

without them the great writers would
infallibly be forgotten in a generation, and the whole world
reel back into barbarism. But, as a rule, they do not even
stop to consider the justification for their own
existence. After all, that is natural; few of God's creatures ever
do, however curious. They would be in danger of ceasing
to exist, if they did. So that it would perhaps be
asking too much to expect that criticism, which has not much
in common with charity in other respects, should begin
at home, by inquiring how far it is itself really worth
while. Still, others may ask.

No doubt some criticism serves a real
purpose; no doubt some of it is entertaining. But surely
any one who is accustomed to question whether things
are worth the amount of life they cost, must feel some
dismay at the enormous quantity of time, energy, and
sometimes intelligence that our age expends upon it.
Besides, may there not be something worse than waste?
In this babel of opinions and arguments about literature I
feel there is much that is not only sterile, but also
sterilising. Criticism becomes at times a superstition and a
drug. The ivy begins to darken the house.

The present age has no great faith in
anything; but it still tries hard to believe in experts. Not
even the War, nor the Slump, can quite cure it of that.
And certainly the world grows in complexity so fast that
we lie in-creasingly at their mercy. More and more

the expert
tends to dominate the intelligent
individual; the old
ideals of liberty to be replaced by the
organisation, discipline, and inefficiency of the Termite State.
The economists
dispose of our worldly goods, the psycho-
analysts of our
sods. Over a large part of Europe, indeed,
bodies and
souls are nationalised and rationalised
already. The pro-
cess is said to be excellent for the train-
services; but for